

THE OLD SAW



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GUILD OF NEW HAMPSHIRE WOODWORKERS
132 Drinkwater Road, Kensington, NH 03833

May 4, 1992

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - - - John Skewes

I think we had a great meeting at Bill Thomas' shop. A year and a half ago many of us met for the first time. Now after six meetings, the guild is beginning to serve its purpose. Friendships are forming and new faces are becoming familiar. Bill's meeting was interesting because it was about tools not techniques. For the first time I began to understand just how many people have a fascination with old tools. Personally I like a minimum of machinery. Preferably bought with cash. Whether a tool is new or old, I don't care as long as it's safe and efficient.

At the end of the meeting one of our new members was asking me about starting out and what tools to buy. Of course the first thing I thought of was a table saw. And then a jointer, and of course a router and maybe a drill press and a bandsaw is handy etc., etc. The more we talked, the more I felt like Norm Abrams: And that is not a good feeling. To me woodworking is about working wood and architectural expression - making things people need. Putting to use one of the most versatile and beautiful materials we have. For me it's not owning and operating machines. I finally realized I should have said, "Build a bench. Collect some hand tools." What I did advise was to buy John Alesandros' book Making a Chair from a Tree. All you need is a draw knife, an auger, and a shaving horse. You learn about selecting trees, getting lumber out of them. You learn to cut, shape and bend. And you learn design and construction. Most of all you learn to work wood without major expense.

I do think old machines are beautiful. They are the symbols of the glory days of industrial America. My grandfather started his working life in the mines of Cornwall, and then later in the foundries of New England. He never speaks about the things they made: machines for industry and castings for Detroit. Instead he talks about the moulders and pattern makers and their beautiful tool chests full of priceless chisels and dividers and squares. And always as he speaks, his hands mimic the motions of hand work.

So for me machines prepare the stock for hand work. The romance for me is the bench work.

Other books for learning the minimalist approach to working wood are: anything by Drew Langinger or Roy Underhill. And for kids, Richard Starr.

EDITORS' CORNER - - - Lou Yelgin and Jon Siegel

Our last meeting generated much discussion about old tools and old methods of woodworking, and certainly there is plenty of interest in that. Yet we hear many saying, "I'm not interested in being a mechanic, I'm interested in woodworking! Those people care more about the tools than about what they are making!" Putting all this in perspective is a very individual thing, but we think a common thread runs through this discussion. Most of us who are devoted to fine woodworking of one kind or another are somehow connected to TRADITION. Whether hand tools or machinery, these relics of the past can tell us as much about what our predecessors did and how they did it as the antique pieces we seem to universally revere.

Among the things that we forgot: Credit for the drawing of the Old Saw logo goes to artist Nancy Begin of Andover. Nancy teaches studio art at Proctor Academy.

Anyone interested in helping in ANY way with the publication of the Old Saw, please contact Jon at 934-2765.

The Guild is seeking members who can host meetings. If you think you could do this, contact the Guild Secretary and scheduler of meetings, Steve Cunliffe at 428-7952.

KUDOS

Wayne Marcoux of Manchester received a woodworking award from the League of NH Craftsmen. The occasion was the show at St. Anselms in March and April. As we go to press, we notice Richard Batchelder with a turned bowl on the front page of the Neighbors section of the Concord Monitor.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Guild will be on May 16 at Jim Becker's shop, 45 A Street, Wilder, VT. Jim will demonstrate techniques of making chairs and benches.

Jim McCormack of Clean Aire Technology in Belmont NH will address the membership after the meeting. They sell air cleaning and purifying equipment as well as dust collection systems. Clean Aire has excellent products and offers good service and support.

NOTES FROM THE DOVETAIL CORNER - - - by Roy Noyes

The Guild is a wonderful organization - a true cross section of wood workers and woodworking. From novice to world renowned expert, from hobbyist to part timer to full time professional, from self educated high school dropouts to those with advanced degrees from the finest colleges and universities - the Guild has them all.

The type of woodworking done by Guild members is equally varied. From simple, utilitarian pine products and kitchen cabinets to fancy accessories and custom designed furniture made of exotic woods, from traditional to modernistic, the Guild members make them all in operations ranging from one man shops to small manufacturing concerns.

What a wonderful chance for each of us to listen, to watch, and to learn - to share ideas, to demonstrate and teach others about woodworking. These are the premises that the Guild was founded upon.

Hopefully, this column will become a forum for this sharing of ideas. With your help, we can use it as a means of presenting old and new ideas, and perhaps a little history here and there - for discussion and education of the membership.

To start it off, I'll tell you a little about myself, so that you can understand my point of view. I'm a retired, high tech electronics engineer and use the income from the traditional furniture that I make to supplement my retirement income. I have been a juried member of the League of NH Craftsmen since 1983. I have been laid off twice, for about a year each time, and taught furniture making at NETI during the last layoff.

Woodworking runs in my family. My great-great-grandfather, Issac Noyes was born in Bow, NH and helped settle Wilton, Maine in the late 1700's. He was a carpenter and housewright. His hand-wrought iron framing square, marked 1819 on the back, is my prize antique tool. His son Charles was a carpenter and made millwork in Wilton. Town records show that he took a contract to build at least one of the one-room schools being erected in the 1850's.

My great uncle, David Searles, was a ship's carpenter in Belfast, Maine during the 1850's. The tool chest that he built as an apprentice and the tools it contains are also a part of my antique tool collection.

My grandfather and father were farmers that did woodworking as required on the farm. My early recollections include "helping" my grandfather build apple ladders, repair the hay rack (wagon) and make spokes and other parts to repair wooden wagon wheels. He was a part-time blacksmith and wheelwright as well.

It's interesting that the high tech computer products that I worked on before I retired will be obsolete and discarded in a few years, but that some of my low tech furniture may still be in use 100 or even 200 years from now. I guess this explains my preference for the traditional.

INTERVIEW with JIM BECKER, host of next meeting

O.S.: We know that you began your furnituremaking career at Thos. Moser's shop in Maine. We also know that when you started he wasn't tooled up with CNC routers and the like. What kind of changes took place while you were there, and what prompted you to leave?

JIM: From 1980 to 1986 I worked for Tom and Mary Moser; Tom gets all the credit, but Mary probably deserves an equal share in making Thos. Moser Cabinetmakers a success. When I was hired, Moser's employed ten people making furniture. Six workers upstairs making cases, tables, desks, etc. Three others, including myself, worked downstairs making chairs and benches. For the most part the people upstairs made items one at a time. The less experienced made catalog items or assisted others until they were good and fast. The best did custom items. Downstairs we made chairs in batches of 10 to 25; benches 2 or 3 at a time.

I was there when Moser got the first "Time Saver" wide belt sander, a significant purchase. I watched as the business grew out of the original New Gloucester location; Tom and Mary bought a building in Lewiston and changed the business noticeably. The Lewiston facility was a limited production factory. The "big family" atmosphere changed to a "very nice" factory feel. Generally all catalog items were manufactured in small batches at the Lewiston location. Custom work continued in New Gloucester.

The Lewiston Shop had bigger machines and more of them. The production capacity allowed, or perhaps necessitated, a larger show room and sales staff. The business grew quite rapidly, alienating some of the charter employees. I found the change interesting. I had gone into Moser's hoping to learn as much as I could. The growth provided an ever expanding menu of things to learn. It allowed me to pick and choose among more knowledge and methods than I would have had.

I left when I felt competent. My departure coincidentally coincided with Moser's decision to close the custom shop.

O.S.: When you first opened your own shop, was it freedom or fear that greeted you in the morning? And how was it having coffee and lunch alone?

JIM: I estimate that one out of five days was devoted to gut wrenching fear, mostly financially related. The other four days I was happy, content making furniture and, for the first time, talking to my own customers.

I don't drink coffee, didn't take many breaks. At lunch I read or sometimes visited with Tom Ames, a photographer, who was just opening his studio next door; his presence and similar struggles made my plight easier to bear.

O.S.: A small shop owner has to do many different jobs, from jointer to janitor. Is there any one job that just seemed to come out of the blue: Is it one that you like of one that you loathe?

JIM: I can't think of any job that was completely unexpected. I can think of several that I loathe: balance sheets are high on the list.

O.S.: In your shop I've seen Colonial, Mission, Arts & Crafts, and some pieces that look rather Becker. Is there a Becker style emerging?

JIM: My goal is someday to build only my own designs, or those and only the others that look like fun. In the mean time I market myself as a "custom" furniture maker; ready able and willing to make most anything in solid wood. My immediate goal continues to be to keep the work flowing. I do have a recurring theme in many of my designs, an arch or arched panels, arched bases, etc. If and when I have a "line" of furniture I expect the arch to be there.

O.S.: There is much talk in this issue of O.S. about old machines. Are you an ironhead and antique tool collector/user, or not?

JIM: I like old tools; I love to look at them and wouldn't mind owning some. When I opened my shop, I bought new equipment. I bought items similar to or the same as what I was used to at Thos. Moser's This allowed me to calculate more accurately production times. Same tools, same methods: same times. Also I like to make furniture, not fiddle with machines.

THE ROMANCE OF OLD MACHINES - - - by David Lamb and Jon Siegel

Old machinery has a presence. It does not look cheap, because it was not made cheap. Real care was put into the making by using the best materials, especially plenty of cast iron. Fitting of parts was done by careful hand scraping of mating surfaces. Even though this class of machinery was "mass produced" each machine was handled individually. These workmen and owners felt a real pride in this work and frequently pinstriped or painted floral designs on machinery.

Not only was massiveness and fine craftsmanship a hallmark, but line and design played a big part in the machine's success. Architectural elements contributed a significant influence on style. Machinery made before 1890 frequently used ogees, brackets, turned balusters, moldings, paneling, columns (often fluted or carved), etc. After 1890 these elements were streamlined, but the ogee shaped legs and lathe tail stocks for example continued well into the mid 20th century.

The thing I like about this stuff is that these machines make sense. By studying them you can tell what goes on, unlike much modern equipment, therefore making it "user friendly" and user repairable. In contrast I have a new Italian planer. More than one person has commented on its square severe appearance: "What is that, a wood stove?" That is kind of embarrassing. Then their eyes travel through the shop and they locate the old lathe, bandsaw, jointer, etc., and they will say "Ah, THAT is machinery. They don't make them like that anymore". That's quite true. My planer has enough electronic components in it that if something went awry, I'd be stuck. My customers really like the continuity my shop has with the past. It represents history, tradition, and values. That's good for business.

Some craftsmen may scoff at old machines. "What if something breaks?" Chances are it will only break if it is dropped from a height, or if it is used as an anvil. The only things that might wear will be bearings. In most cases bearings, when babbited, can be repaired on site (as Bill Thomas aptly demonstrated to us). DL

When I was in my twenties, I loved auto mechanics. I liked the feeling that I was responsible for how my car ran, and if it broke down somewhere, I had no one to blame but myself. I cheerfully spent every weekend under the car to insure that it would make it through another week of commuting. Where ever I went, I carried an extensive tool kit with me, and several times made repairs in the parking lot of an auto parts store in some strange town. I never spent more than a few hundred dollars on a car in those days. But that was twenty years ago. The thrill is gone. Now I just want a car that runs and no nonsense.

So why the fascination with old shop machinery? You'd think I would have outgrown that too, but I haven't. Some people like to look at old machinery in a museum...some people think my shop is like a museum...but I love USING old machines. Here are some reasons:

1. Old machines are practical because they are cheap. When you pay next to nothing for a machine, you can afford to spend some time and/or money fixing it up. Which brings me to the next point:
2. Fixing it up is half the fun. I have a small machine shop which allows me to make new parts (screws etc.) and adapt modern tooling to old machinery.
3. Giving a machine a new lease on life is a rewarding feeling. It makes you think that you are doing something to combat the "throw-away" mentality of modern consumerism.
4. Using an old machine gives one a connection to better days gone by when craftsmanship was revered. This is reflected in the design of many old machines which were aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.

Many woodworkers are particular about what kinds of "modern" features they insist on having on their machines. There are certain lines they will not cross. Many of these are worthy of discussion among Guild members. Some have safety implications. I write them out here for further consideration.

1. Babbit bearings vs. ball bearings.
 2. Tilting table (on saw) vs. tilting arbor.
 3. Square head vs. round head (jointer or planer).
 4. Plain shaper knives vs. lock-edge/corrugated back.
 5. Flat belt vs. vee belts.
 6. Wedge bed planers vs. screw elevating.
 7. Wedge bed jointer vs. four corner ramps.
 8. Solid feed rollers vs. sectional feed rollers on planer.
 9. Top wheel drive vs. four wheel drive on planer.
 10. Left-handed vs. right-handed band saws.
 11. Wooden wheels vs. metal wheels on band saws.
- And I won't even mention treadle power! JS

MUSEUM REVIEW - - - by John McAlevey

I recently had the pleasure of visiting the Wharton Esherick Museum in Paoli, Pennsylvania. For those who are not aware of Wharton Esherick and his work, Esherick was an artist, sculptor and furniture maker who was born in Philadelphia in 1887. In the 1920's after attending Philadelphia's School of Industrial Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, he began sculpting and making furniture. At the same time he began building his studio and shop buildings on the hillside behind his farmhouse in Paoli. After his death in 1970 his family and friends formed the Wharton Esherick Museum. Wharton Esherick made furniture that expressed a completely original and organic approach to furniture making. He worked directly with local sawmills and lumbermen, and he took full advantage of his material, working with the natural crooks, bends and free sweeping edges of the boards he had sawn for himself. His organic approach to furniture making gave birth to some of the most original furniture I know of.

Many furniture makers of the late 20th century creating original furniture acknowledge the great debt owed to Esherick. His furniture showed that furniture design need not remain sterile and stagnant in time and that furniture making could be approached in a way similar to an artist creating a piece of original art work in his studio.

Not limiting himself to free standing furniture, he also designed and built interior installations for the houses of his clients. For the 1940 World's Fair in New York, he, along with the architect George Howe, designed and made the furniture for a Pennsylvania Hill House in the "America at Home" exhibit. The well known staircase for his studio was dismantled and rebuilt for the exhibit. While the staircase was on exhibit, Esherick used a ladder which he built to reach his upstairs bedroom.

It is extremely difficult to pigeon-hole the Esherick style. While he was certainly aware of the current happenings in the art and architecture of his time, he seems not to have completely fallen for and adopted any then current craze. Instead he seems to have worked parallel to current movements with his own creative spirit dominating his work.

Esherick did not eschew power tools, saying in an interview with Sam Maloof and Donald McKinley in "Craft Horizons" magazine, "I use any damn machinery I can get hold of, hand-crafted has nothing to do with it. I'll use my teeth if I have to." He had helpers who did stock preparation and much of the joinery while he concentrated on the form, shaping and carving of his pieces.

As a beginning woodworker in 1966 I visited Esherick in his studio. I was at the time overwhelmed by the man, the architecture and his furniture. Now that I have revisited his studio 26 years later, I am able with a more experienced eye to really see and appreciate his life's work. The Wharton Esherick Museum contains over 200 pieces of his work. Guided hourly tours are given to the public on weekends, March through December, and advance reservations are required. I highly recommend a visit and tour. It is a rare opportunity to see the evolution of one man's life work and art in one place.

For those interested in visiting the museum: The Wharton Esherick Museum, Box 595, Paoli, Pennsylvania 19301. 215-644-5822.

For further reading on Esherick and his work: Fine Woodworking #19, American Woodworker #12 (Feb. 1990), Fine Homebuilding # 21, Art and Antiques May 1989, and Contemporary American Woodworkers by Michael Stone.

WOOD DAY at SHAKER VILLAGE - - - Dave Emerson

Don't miss the second annual Wood Day, May 9, at Canterbury Shaker Village, 288 Shaker Rd., Canterbury NH, featuring many of the Guild's finest as well as some of the best antique tool dealers, lecturers on NH furniture from 1750-1850 at 11:00, and new discoveries in Shaker Furniture at Canterbury at 1:30. The regular tours and crafts will be open plus a chicken barbecue.

Guild woodworkers demonstrating include Andy Motter and Jon Siegel - two lathes in action, and David Behm on the small lathe. Steve McPhee and David Lamb team up on frame-and-panel construction this year. Garrett Hack will cooper again - a bucket this time. Mark Lord will again cover finishing. Cindi Bailey will make an ash basket start to finish. Michael Fonner covers chair seating and Robert Pothier Jr. - hand planed paneling and 18th century window sash. Al Greene is back with draw-boring hand cut mortise and tenon. Scott Jenkins will use his lathe to make a stool. Other demonstrations include Federalist fireplace and spoon making. If you weren't listed here, please call me 783-4403 evenings Monday - Thursday 6:30 - 8:30. And be sure to check out the new Carpenter Shop Gallery which is filling with excellent work from many Guild (and some non-Guild) craftspeople.

SHOP SPACE - - - Perspective by David Emerson

Woodworking is an endeavor of true individualists. There is no more obvious evidence than their workshops. I have yet to enter a single shop which reminds me of another. All are unique. From one which must have held more than the owner could remember, to another which felt almost empty by comparison, all are as individual as the cabinet makers who inhabit them. The shops are often a clearer expression of their owners than the work done in them, and most often fit their creators like old clothes. I think most woodworkers would be as unlikely to be completely comfortable in another's shop as they would in another's clothes.

One of the benefits of spending the day in another's shop is returning to mine with the pleasure of putting on an older pair of jeans and sneakers, for I have been conforming the fit of my shop to myself for almost a decade.

Certainly we follow our line of work because we love to produce beautiful things of wood, and because working with wood (a material as various and individualistic as we are) is right for us. But being able to spend our lives in a workspace of our own design is definitely not of secondary importance. The design and tooling of our shops occupies almost as much of our thought and planning as our production itself.

I am reminded of an intense experience I had years ago - sitting in the driver's seat of an old Ford Mustang belonging to a young fellow I employed. Almost his entire non-working life was spent in or under this car. His favorite activity was to drag race 'til he tore up the transmission, and then rebuild it. After sitting in that seat, I knew him better than I had before. For all of us a car is more than a machine, and a shop is more than a workspace.

A few minutes in the bucket seat of that old blue Mustang, and I could feel what Dan's car meant to him. A day in any of the shops I've visited has never been sufficient. Those few shops where I can stop by on a normal workday are of special value to me. All the shop spaces I've shared broaden the space in my own. Though they don't fit me, they give me a sense of shared experience that assures I'll never have to work alone.

 CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

 FOR SALE

All purpose building currently used as woodworking shop. 1600 SF studio/shop space. 1000 SF showroom or living space w/skylights. Full bath and storage space. New mechanical systems. 3 phase electric. Town water and waste. Located in Warner, NH, 20 mi. west of Concord. 1-1/2 hrs. from Boston. Ideal building for artist/craftsman. \$99,500. (Some woodworking machinery may be available with building.) Call or write John McAlevey, Mill St., Rt. 2, Box 793, Warner, NH 03278. 603-456-2135.

Makita Waterstone Blade/Knife Sharpener with 1000 grit and 120 grit green wheel. \$165. Adler Stroke Sander, 3 motors, 3 phase. 36 x 96 table. Assortment of new sanding belts. Price drastically reduced. \$2000. John 456-2135.

Rockwell/Delta 16" Jig Saw. Model # 40-102. \$250. Metal lathe, made by Flather and Sons of Nashua. 16" swing, 36" between centers. \$400 or BO. Call David 783-9912.

Black Walnut seedlings \$2 for members. Japanese plane blades for metal planes, laminated steel, 1-3/8 and 1-5/8 for low angle planes. Also 1-13/16 and 2-7/16. \$20. 428-7952.

Sandpaper, no load, wet/dry, production. Large grit assortment. \$.20/sheet. Call after 6:00 PM. 675-2567. Gerard Gagne.

 ITEMS WANTED

Wanted: Scraps of Baltic Birch plywood, especially 1/2". Even 6" pieces not too small. Jon 934-2765.

Wanted: Carving Tools. 428-7952.

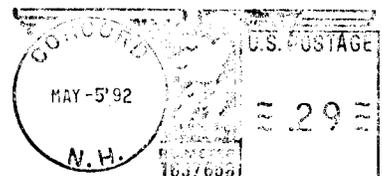
Wanted: Used American Made Drill Press. Lou 424-4888.

 OPPORTUNITIES

Rodale Press is seeking "shop tips" for publication. Will pay \$25 each. See John Skewes at meeting, or call him for details 778-7360.

Juried Consignment (33%). Hand-crafted furniture, home accessories and gifts. Contact Lisa Adler, The Monadnock Artisan's Gallery, Rt. 12, Box 56A, Westmoreland, NH 03467. 352-2806.

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